

Je vous aime

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Je vous aime

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Summary

“What’s a shame?”

Francis looks at him. Really looks at him, and brushes his jaw with his knuckles.

“That you have such a lovely voice, you terrible man. And you so rarely let me hear it.”

There is a tear caught in the corner of Arthur’s lash line, from the laughter, from the wind that dried his eyes; because he is tired. It could be any one of those things or a little of them all. Francis reaches up to brush it away, and Arthur is so still—so very still—as he does it that Francis thinks he might be holding his breath.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

“Drink!”

Arthur’s eyes are gleeful as he slams his hand down on the table.

“No!” Francis shakes his head vehemently and bites back laughter. “No. You said ‘specific’.”

“Fine,” Arthur agrees lightly and leans back as if to say *suit yourself*. “Allow me to rephrase then. If we were in Paris...”

“Which we were, but a day ago and you could have—”

“Shut up,” Arthur snickers. “If we were in Paris,” he tries again. “And I looked through your drawers—”

“Oh, *cher*. ”

“ *Hush* !” Arthur nudges his feet under the table. “Upstairs, in your office.”

He underlines every syllable with a careful tap of his empty glass against the table. The sound is drowned out by the din of the tavern but Francis feels the vibration under his forearm where it is resting on the table.

“Now,” Francis objects, gesturing vaguely with the hand that isn’t holding his overfilled glass. “Is it theft, technically, if the letters were addressed to *me* .”

“Yes. Drink!”

Francis toasts him and throws back his drink, coughing when it burns as it slides down his throat. Arthur laughs at him, loose and happy, and Francis wishes he could bottle it up to carry with him.

“Your turn!” He picks up the bottle he brought back from the bar a good hour ago to serve him; finding it much lighter now than it was then.

The bottle itself is bare, with a raised vine detail climbing up the side and a smear of glue where the label was peeled off before it was reused. Francis does not like anise liqueurs for the most part, but the family that owns this tavern makes the best pastis he has ever had, and having a glass or two every time he is in the area with company has become a tradition of sorts. It has been decades now since he first stepped inside for coffee and a chat, and he still looks forward to it each time; calling out a familiar greeting to well-known faces and being assured that it is safe to return. They have never asked questions, not Camille or her husband while they were still alive, nor any of their children or their spouses and so on. It helps that Francis has never been anything but unfailingly polite and familiar, so they welcome him warmly, and keep a bottle set aside for him when he visits, putting only a token resistance when Francis insists he pay for it.

He pours Arthur a healthy measure of liquor with a flourish, and does not spill a drop. Arthur nods his head in mock thanks and takes his glass, resting both elbows on the table and leaning in closer. "Go on, then."

Francis takes a moment to think.

"1763."

Arthur cocks an eyebrow. "Yes?"

"We came here," Francis reminisces. "Three months after the treaty was signed to formalise things amongst ourselves. I had a lovely dinner set out and Antonio drank two bottles of my best wine and ate half the dessert before I could finish plating everything." He is still a little miffed about that.

Arthur looks like he is starting to realise where Francis is going with this. "And?"

"You disappeared out into the balcony with Joao, for almost two hours. Came back looking a little winded, if I recall."

"Ask your question." Arthur hurries him along.

Francis lowers his voice and holds his gaze. "Did you make love? Out on the balcony. Did he press you into the wall and peel away your shirt? It was a warm night, but for the breeze. He must have felt so hot pressed against your front. All that lovely skin," he says, a little wistful. They must have been a sight to see. Francis would be lying if he claimed that he hadn't tried to picture it before. Joao's broad shoulders, the handsome curl of his thick, dark hair as it tumbled free from its ribbon with a tug of Arthur's fingers. The sweet scent of jasmine climbing up the veranda.

Arthur hums, and smiles impishly. "No."

"No?"

"No."

"What then?" Francis is genuinely at a loss.

Arthur shrugs. "We drank a bottle of your best wine. Watered down your worst, and slipped it to Antonio before we stole the second. Then watched from the balcony as you argued about the bloody... pastry, cake. Whatever it was you'd made and he kept sneaking from the kitchen every time you turned your back."

Francis should not find that as funny as he does. "For two hours?"

"A good hour at least."

"And the other?"

"Well." Arthur tilts his head. "You asked if we fucked on your *balcony*."

“*Merde* .” Francis leans back into his chair, ribs aching, and covers his eyes with one hand to wipe away the tears laughter brings to his eyes.

Across from him, Arthur laughs behind the rim of his glass and takes a sip of his drink.

“Come one. I’ll give you another go,” he offers.

Wind-swept and glowing under the dim, warm light of the tavern, he almost looks like the sailor he once was. His face is flushed from the drink and laughter, and underneath that Francis can already tell where the summer sun is beginning to smatter freckles across the bridge of his nose. The first button of his shirt is undone, and with his sleeves rolled-up, it is the most skin Francis has seen Arthur bare in public for a very long time.

“Tell me.” Francis rests his forearms on the table again, bringing them closer so he can lower his voice again.

“Hm?” Arthur leans in closer as well to match him.

“Do you think about him still?”

Arthur presses his lips together and does not answer at first. Not until he curses and drops his head to laugh softly down at the table. When he downs his drink, Francis has his answer.

“God, what is this?” Arthur gives his glass a spin when he sets it back down next to Francis’. It is a neat little trick he has seen Portugal do before, and Francis wonders absently about who taught the other how to do it.

“House specialty.” Francis refills both of their glasses and tips the last drops into Arthur’s glass for good fortune.

“Dangerous stuff. It’s delicious.”

“It is,” Francis chuckles. “We should have watered it down.”

“Hm, and had dessert.”

Francis has no idea what time it is, only that it is late and the coastal breeze carries easy laughter with it from all around them.

“Last glass.” He places Arthur’s nipper directly in his hand, letting their fingers brush, and raises his. “To watered down wine!”

Arthur toasts him. “To watered down wine.”

They bring their glasses up and drink them down like it is a game, holding each other’s eyes without blinking until the bottoms are clear. Neither of them swallow, and the thick bottoms make a satisfying clink against the wood when they put them down at the same time.

Francis is the first to smile, covering his mouth with his hand to swallow so he can laugh freely. When he looks back, Arthur is looking at him with an expression that is unbearably

fond, eyes squinted slightly and chin resting on his hand.

“What?” Francis asks.

“Nothing.” Arthur straightens and spins his glass again, striving for casual. His smile is the only thing that gives him away, still dangerously soft.

“*What*,” Francis kicks him under the table.

“*Nothing*.” Arthur kicks him back, and when Francis tries to retaliate catches his ankle between his feet. “Behave.”

Francis cannot get his foot loose when he tries, so he lets Arthur have it. Subtly slips his foot out of his other shoe instead so he can slip his toes up Arthur’s trouser leg.

Arthur’s knee shoots up and hits the table so hard that Francis has to be quick and catch the bottle before he sends it crashing to the ground, laughing. Laughs until he tries to slip on his shoe on again and discovers that he can’t because Arthur is stepping on it.

“Get your dirty sole off my shoe.” He tries, and fails, to sound serious. Arthur lets him have an inch back before stepping down again. “Arthur.”

“What?” he echoes tauntingly. “You owe me a question.”

“These people know me.”

“Then answer my question, and you can have your shoe back.”

“You’ll get us thrown out.” Francis slips his foot up his leg again and pulls down his sock with his toe, but Arthur is expecting it this time and doesn’t so much as flinch. Francis keeps his foot pressed to his skin anyways, in a one-sided game of footsie. “Fine. Ask your question.”

Arthur grins, opens his mouth like he is going to say something... and then frowns, looking away.

“Yes?” Francis prods him, tapping his insole against his bare ankle.

Arthur dissolves into what Francis could only generously describe as a chortle and sinks his face into his hands. “I forgot.”

“Oh, lapin,” Francis shakes his head and steals back his shoe while Arthur is busy trying to get a grip of himself. “You are drunk. Drunk as a bottle.”

“The hell does that even mean?” Arthur drops his hands, smiling loosely.

“That it is time to go.” He has to reach under the table to pull on his shoe properly and something about the way Arthur snorts clues him in to the fact that he is not being half as smooth or subtle as he thinks he is. “Allons-y.”

They stand without much of a fuss and gather their things in companionable silence. Arthur holds Francis' coat for him to slip into; a fine linen thing that is as light on his shoulders as it is flattering. It feels good. Francis enjoys being led and cared for like this. Likes the way Arthur will push in his chair so Francis won't bash his knee on it as he walks around the table as much as he enjoyed letting him pull out his chair for him when they first arrived. Enjoys how Arthur will touch him when he finds an excuse to do so, pressing a steadying hand to Francis' lower back when he turns too fast to call out a goodbye and brushing his wrist to call his attention. Casual and affectionate.

The current owner's son-in-law, André, runs out of the kitchen before they can step outside, and they end up getting pulled into conversation. Or Arthur is, leaning by the bar and lending an ear to the young woman behind the counter while Francis is ushered to the back to try a slice of freshly-baked vitréais with a dollop of homemade cream swirled on one side of the plate. The only thing he would add is more caramel. He says so, and spends another few minutes arguing back and forth good-naturedly about it and bartering for recipes before they walk back to the front-of-house.

Arthur is still by the bar, waiting. He'd ingratiated himself the first time Francis brought him around by speaking the local dialect fluently and wielding the quiet charm of him in his favour. A naturally compelling story-teller and outrageously quick-witted, they never stood a chance. And oh, if only they knew the half of it.

They leave with a cheerful chorus of well-wishes ringing after them and a promise to come calling again before they leave. Francis will make sure of it.

The streets grow quieter the further they walk from the tavern and the main veins of the town. The council had finally installed street lighting... Francis can't remember when, but they have; as little as they seem to want to maintain it. It lends the streets a dreamlike atmosphere, warm and dim where they had grown used to walking in the dark for centuries, with only the pale glow of the moon to light their way on clear summer nights such as this.

Modern lighting does not spare Francis from tripping over a loose stone.

Arthur catches him with an arm around the waist and a snort. "Put your arm around my shoulder before you fall flat on your face," he grouches.

...And immediately trips over nothing himself.

It's Francis' turn to grip the shoulder of his shirt to keep him upright, and they both have to stop for a moment to laugh into each other while they find their footing.

Francis' heels make him taller than usual so Arthur ends up burying his face in his collarbone for a moment.

"You were saying?" Francis gives him a jostle and holds him close with an arm over his shoulders as they start walking again.

"Oh, bugger. Get over yourself." Arthur pinches his waist.

It is not conscious at first, but as they start swaying slightly as they amble down the street, taking their time on their way home. Francis leans into it, resting more of his weight on Arthur until he has to join in to compensate. “What in the world are you doing?”

“Sing me a song,” Francis requests.

Arthur scoffs. “Don’t be absurd.”

“Viens! Just one.”

“What song?” Arthur asks, in what Francis is sure is an attempt to shut him up.

Francis hums, thinking for a moment before he croons back, “Parlez-moi d’amour, redites-moi des choses tendres...!”

Arthur hushes him with a scandalised half-laugh. “You’re going to wake up—Francis!”

Francis tightens his hold on him and sings a little louder, slightly off-key even to his ears. “Votre beau discours, mon cœur n’est pas las de l’entendre!”

He keeps singing as they walk, nudging Arthur who laughs but still refuses to join in. Someone cheers at them from a balcony and Francis stops to blow them a kiss and sings a stanza just for them while Arthur muffles a groan into his shoulder.

The streets darken the further they walk; homes beginning to spread out over stretches of farmland and pasture. Francis is still going strong, moving on to an atrocious rendition of a popular version of *Plaisir d’amour* when Arthur finally joins in, softly at first and then louder to Francis’ delight.

The buzz from the alcohol has begun to settle into his bones, leaving his body feeling heavy and warm, and his mind clear. Francis lets his voice taper off after the second chorus; just listens to Arthur sing. And what a voice he has, graceful and bright even when he isn’t trying. A lovely tenor. He closes his eyes and lets himself enjoy it, trusting that Arthur will not lead him off the path. That he knows the way home.

Arthur falls silent, seeming to realise that he is singing by himself and, without any real thought spared for it, they slow down to a stop on the quiet country road.

“C’est une honte,” Francis sighs, and drops his arm away to let Arthur turn to face him.

“What’s a shame?”

Francis looks at him. Really looks at him, and brushes his jaw with his knuckles.

“That you have such a lovely voice, you terrible man. And you so rarely let me hear it.”

There is a tear caught in the corner of Arthur’s lash line, from the laughter, from the wind that dried his eyes; because he is tired. It could be any one of those things or a little of them all. Francis reaches up to brush it away, and Arthur is so still—so very still—as he does it that Francis thinks he might be holding his breath.

He moves slowly. Cups Arthur's cheek and brushes his thumb over his cheekbone, mapping the shadow of his eyelashes. Arthur holds just as still, and Francis is suddenly struck by it; the realisation that this has been right in front of him for so long that he's been blind to it. Wonders, a little awed, just how long Arthur has loved him like this.

When he leans in to kiss him, Arthur sighs, and it wraps itself like a vice around Francis' heart.

Arthur's eyes are still open when he draws back, always so vigilant, rarely trusting. So Francis leans in again and keeps his eyes open this time as well. Does not kiss him; only brushes their lips together and holds his gaze until Arthur gives in and lets his eyes slip close. Francis does kiss him then, as deeply and as sweetly as he ever has, tilting his head with the gentle grip he has on his jaw, and pulling him closer with a hand pressed to the small of his back.

Arthur's lips are swollen when Francis is done kissing him breathless, and he licks them subtly when he draws back, sending a pang of desire through Francis' whole body.

"You taste sweet," he whispers, calm and a little hazy.

Francis hums a happy sound, and finds his hand blindly. Brings it up to press a light kiss to his knuckles.

"Let me take you to bed," he asks, voice husky with honest desire.

Arthur's nod is a subtle thing, but he kisses Francis back fiercely when he steals one last kiss before taking him home.

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They've had sex before. For politics, for comfort. For the intimate pleasure of a warm body. Rarer still for joy. But never quite like this.

Arthur keeps his distance when they cross the threshold, and Francis reaches for him. Tucks his hair behind his ear to press a chaste kiss to his cheek, another closer to the bridge of his nose, and then his mouth. Runs his hands down his sides to keep him grounded and focused before his mind can take off, spinning in a hundred different directions. Sucks a line of kisses down the proud length of his neck to ward off any doubts. Holds Arthur close enough to let him feel the wild racing of his heart--to let him know that he is not alone in this. That Francis is right here with him, standing on the edge of something new.

They stumble again as they try to kick off their shoes without breaking their embrace, and when Arthur breathes a laugh into Francis' neck before kissing him there, Francis can't help the moan that it rips from his chest. It feels delicious to want someone and be able to hold

their joy so intimately near. And in that moment Francis wants him so much that it borders on need.

Arthur kisses him and leads him to the living room with a kind of single-minded determination that is intoxicating to have focused on him. Even with their shirts undone and pressed together, and with Francis' hand slipped down the back of Arthur's trousers to grab a handful of him, it doesn't feel like they are close enough.

He lets Arthur push him against the back of a couch and tilts his head back to let him suck a tender spot near his Adam's apple. He licks his way down after he is seemingly satisfied with the bruise he leaves behind, and Francis kneads the hair at the nape of his neck as he turns his attention to his collarbones first and then his nipples. Rests more of his weight against the couch so Arthur will have something to brace against as he slips between Francis' thighs to press them closer together. It puts much needed pressure on his cock and Francis hitches his hips to make the best of the friction before Arthur drops smoothly to his knees and grabs a hold of them to keep him still.

"Darling." The pet name rolls easily off his tongue and Francis keeps cradling the back of his head as Arthur mouths at the outline of his cock where it is starting to press against the taut fabric of his trousers. Makes him drip before he even starts working on his belt, and then takes his time peeling back the layers between his mouth and Francis' skin.

He is not wearing any underwear, and Arthur muffles a groan that sounds almost reproachful against the thick, golden curls that lead down to his groin. Buries his nose by the crease of Francis' thigh, filthy and shameless as he finally pulls down Francis' trousers, and only draws back when Francis pulls lightly at his hair so he can step out of them.

"How come you never seem to wear pants?" Arthur asks.

"They would ruin the line of-- *oh*," Francis interrupts himself with a moan when Arthur takes the head into his mouth, sucking away the precum beading on his slit and pressing the flat of his tongue against the frenulum.

He is sloppy with it. Tastes him at his leisure and when he is done uses the hand that isn't gripping the back of Francis' thigh to press him against his belly so he can run his tongue in broad strokes from base to tip to get him good and wet, letting the precum that is weeping from the head run down his shaft. Francis cannot look away; fights to keep his eyes focused even as Arthur mouths wetly against the frenulum again. It's even harder when Arthur takes him into his mouth again, relaxing his jaw. Lets him slip in deeper, taking measured breaths as Francis starts edging near the back of his tongue, and then, carefully, *deeper*-- until he is slipping into his throat and Arthur struggles to swallow around him.

Francis calls his name out helplessly and Arthur looks up, startling slightly when he meets Francis' eyes and choking a little because of it. Francis has to dig his nails into the couch to keep still, and takes firmer hold of Arthur's scalp, tilting his head gently again until his mouth is aligned with his throat. Arthur times his breathing with each small shift and Francis can feel the warmth of his exhalations against his pubic bone, when Arthur buries his nose in his curls again, reaching the base. When he moans, Francis has to squeeze his eyes shut or risk coming prematurely.

He thrusts his hips slowly and Arthur lets himself be used; just digs his fingers harder into Francis' thigh and reaches between his legs to press into his own hand with the spread of his thighs.

Francis groans, and whispers praise to him for how well he is taking him, how hot his mouth is. Soothes him when he chokes. Reaches down to grip his throat and feel him struggling to swallow when he holds him down gently down to the base until he runs out of air. It is the sweetest kind of power to have over another person, and the trust Arthur yields to him makes Francis' thighs shake.

He pulls out of his throat one last time with a wet sound and Arthur pants, shifting his sore jaw and resting his forehead against Francis' hip for a moment as he catches his breath.

Francis drops to his knees to kiss him and lick the taste of himself out of Arthur's mouth. Urges him to kneel a little higher, so Francis can get his clothes out of the way and brace them against the couch before reaching between Arthur's legs to grab a firm hold of him. He is so wet his hand slips easily over his length, taking care to twist his wrist over the head until Arthur moans, and gives over more of his weight, going a little limp in Francis' arms.

Francis pulls him in tighter, making sure that they won't send the couch skidding across the living room, and uses the advantage he has over Arthur to suck on his tongue until he keens. Arthur grabs a fistful of his hair when he makes a blind grab for his neck and Francis slips his hand lower to make a ring around the base of his cock and feel him drip over his fingers, twitching wet and vulnerable in his hand.

He gentles their kiss, nuzzling the bend of Arthur's jaw until he releases his hold on Francis' hair and brushes his fingers through it instead, untangling the soft strands of it as they both come down, dragging out the pleasure of being together like this. Lets go of his cock after a long moment to grab a hold of his hip instead, smearing precum on his skin.

Arthur nudges his chin up again to suck on his bottom lip, giving him one last playful nip before cupping his cheek. Francis tries futilely to tame the sweaty tangle of Arthur's hair by running a hand through it, and loves dearly to see him so dishevelled.

"Bed," Francis suggests, and Arthur gives his lip another nip before pulling away to stand.

Francis' knees crack when he straightens them too quickly—one of them worryingly loud—and Arthur laughs at him while taking both of his elbows to help heave him up despite the way he groans when he stretches his own, slightly numb legs. What a pair they make, of scars and aches in bodies that look too young to bear them.

In the bedroom, Francis takes a moment to turn on the lamp on his bedside table.

It brings Arthur to a pause where he is shrugging off his shirt and he looks questioningly over to where Francis is already bare and comfortable in his nudity.

Francis kisses the worried furrow of his brow to sooth it away. "I want to see you," he whispers, slipping his hands into Arthur's briefs to push them down his hips.

Arthur snorts, stepping out of them. “Wouldn’t want you to strain your eyes as well as your knees,” he diverts.

Francis pinches his bottom to make him hiss. Then presses his foreheads together and smiles fondly at him. “Whatever is racing through this stubborn head of yours?”

Arthur only hums, noncommittal, so Francis kisses the mullish purse of his lips until he softens and kisses him back. slips Arthur’s shirt down the rest of the way and runs his nails up his back lightly. It makes Arthur’s skin pebble with a shiver that runs from the base of his spine to his shoulder blades, and he tips his head back to let Francis press a kiss to the hollow of his throat. It distracts him and shifts his weight enough that Francis can easily topple him backwards onto the bed.

Arthur tries to raise himself up on his elbows but Francis pushes him back down again with a hand on his sternum. His heart beats steady and strong under his palm, and when Francis lets him go this time, Arthur stays.

He keeps a thick glass jar of sweet almond oil in his drawer, old-fashioned and preferred over whatever he could buy at the pharmacy. It feels more intimate to be able to dip his fingers and coat his hand generously before coming back to straddle Arthur on the bed. Lighter on the skin too as he smears it over Arthur’s lower stomach and the cradle of his hips, avoiding his cock, before taking his own in hand and the rest of the oil over himself with leisurely strokes.

Arthur’s eyes are dark and heavy on him, watching him as he pleasures himself.

“You like this.” Francis brings his free hand up to caress his own chest, sweeping a thumb where Arthur’s kisses left a small bruise by his nipple.

Arthur reaches over to touch the softness of his waistline. Holds him steady when Francis rocks his hips and moans. “Like what?”

“Watching me.”

“Of course I do. You’re lovely,” Arthur whispers, as good and honest a confession as Francis has ever heard from him.

(Francis does not say, “Is it truly so hard to believe that I find you lovely as well? That I have looked after you as you walked past, caught the scent of you like a ghost lingering on my pillow and wished that you had stayed long enough for me to see you under the light of day? Let me see you. Let me taste you. Let me know it’s you underneath me. That it is you. That it has always been you.”)

He lets Arthur lift him a little by the waist; just enough so he can slip a leg from underneath him so Francis is only straddling one of his thighs. He will have more leverage to thrust against him that way, and Francis lowers himself with a sigh, pressing their hips together and holding himself up by bracing his forearms on the bed. Pinning Arthur down on the bed with his weight while fully aware that it is Arthur’s choice to let him.

Arthur exhales shakily underneath him and rocks his hips up to meet him, whispering low encouragements against his jaw. He tried to muffle his pleasure by pressing his lips together but there is no disguising the hot blush that spreads across his cheeks when Francis bears down with a little more pressure and rocks them together.

Francis' sides have always been sensitive, and he loves that Arthur knows that--drags his hands up his ribs slowly to reach around him, and spreads his fingers over his back to sweep over his shoulder blades as they thrust against each other. Hooks his thigh over Francis' hip to bring them impossibly closer. Francis shifts his weight to hold himself up one-armed so he can touch Arthur's chest in turn.

"Je me sens si bien." He buzzes the words against the corner of Arthur's mouth. "Tu me fais me sentir si bien."

"J'aime te tenir comme ça," Arthur whispers back, and Francis kisses him deeply for it.

The thrusts of their hips gain a desperate edge as their cocks brush against each other, leaking and hard. Francis hopes they'll stain the sheets. Leave them smelling like almonds and their sweat; like sex, so he'll be able to bask in the smell of it come morning.

He can tell Arthur is close when he throws his head back and to the side, biting his knuckles to muffle his moans and closing his eyes. Usually, Francis would let him. This time, he stops fondling Arthur's chest to take his wrist and draw it away.

Arthur stops moving and frowns up at him, looking caught between bewildered indignation and offence. Francis breathes a laugh as he rocks his hips lightly to coax him back into an easy rhythm.

"What are you trying?"

"I told you." He smiles and shifts the rolling of his hips into a slow drag that makes Arthur's eyes slip close for a moment. "I want to see you. I want to hear you."

Where Arthur finds the wherewithal to roll his eyes at him even now, Francis isn't sure. So he laughs again and dips his head to kiss the corner of his mouth affectionately despite the fussy sound Arthur makes at him when he won't release his wrist when he tugs at it.

Arthur's free hand is tangled in his hair, and Francis lets him guide their kiss into something deeper. The pleasure of it is wonderfully distracting, but Francis is no fool. When Arthur tries to slip his hand away again he threads their fingers together to hold him fast and bites his bottom lip softly in warning.

Arthur breaks their kiss to laugh. "Oh, fuck off."

Francis gives them a little space so he can look at him properly and grins when Arthur bites back a moan. "Let me hear you, you stubborn horror of a man."

He circles his hips slowly until Arthur finally stops biting his lips and gasps a broken curse. He pinches Francis' nipple in an underhanded attempt to distract him from his goal, but

Francis only groans, cock twitching where it is caught between their bellies, and keeps working his hips against him. Arthur soothes the hurt with the pad of his thumb and Francis sighs, hips stuttering and feeling them both drip precum against each other.

When Arthur tries to look away to hide his pleasure he lowers himself until their chests are pressed together and cups his jaw. “*Non* . Look at me.” His thumb brushes against the plush curve of his bottom lip and Arthur’s tongue darts out to lick him, almost reflexively. Francis groans, pushing his thumb between his lips, for Arthur to suck. When he does, Francis has to still his hips to keep himself from coming just from that.

Arthur looks like he’s killing him, brows furrowed and eyes hazy. He tilts his head back with a moan, and Francis’ thumb traces a wet path down his chin when it slips out of his mouth. “Fuck. Francis,” he gasps. “Fuck, I’m going to cum.”

He lets go of Francis’ shoulder, where he had been trying to find some purchase, and tries to bite the knuckles of his left hand, almost a little desperately. Francis catches that hand too, threading their fingers together and holding him *down* .

“You really are the worst,” Arthur gripes, voice strangled by another helpless moan and the twitch of his smile.

“Come on,” Francis urges him and bears down on him again. Arthur’s heels dig sharply into his arse and the meat of his calf where they are tangled together. He sucks a kiss on Arthur’s lips and nudges his nose against him. “Please. Fais-le pour moi.”

The next time Arthur calls out his name it sounds almost like a sob, and Francis finally relents. Keeps holding his hands away from his face but folds himself over Arthur until he can tuck his face under the bend of his neck, to make him feel less exposed and hold him closer.

He mouths at Arthur’s jaw and whispers filthy nothings into his skin. Sucks on Arthur’s earlobe until he moans and his thighs shake with the effort of trying to keep up with the rolls of Francis’ hips. Begs him to cum until Arthur does with a gasp and a sharp thrust of his hips against Francis.

He is almost quiet about it, but Francis has him pinned down and uses it to his advantage. Keeps moving against him until Arthur bucks and moans underneath him, groaning from the overstimulation and calling out his name like a curse. Francis lets his voice wash over him and spur him on, squeezing Arthur’s hands in his and riding out his orgasm with a sharp moan and a wave of relief.

His hands lose their grip as he loses himself a little in the pleasure, and he moans in reproach when Arthur slips one of his hands away before he can stop him. Has it muffled almost immediately against Arthur’s lips when he drags him back into a kiss. Francis can feel them both twitch, still caught between the press of their joined hips, and shivering a little as they come down. They don’t stop kissing even as they shift slightly to relieve some of the pressure to let themselves recover, still sensitive and a little sore from how roughly they moved against each other.

Arthur is still cradling the back of his neck as Francis sighs, breaking them apart gently and letting himself go limp knowing that Arthur will take his weight easily and gladly.

Neither of them speak, content to share in each other's space as their bodies cool and they catch their breath. Arthur's hand starts petting his hair absent-mindedly, threading his fingers through the waves of it and tugging lightly at the root the way he would if Francis had a headache. Brushing away the sweaty strands that stick to his temple in a repetitive motion that soothes them both.

Francis sighs again, pressing his closed lips against the side of Arthur's neck and enjoying the easy affection. He gives Arthur's fingers one last squeeze before he lets go and rests his hand on Arthur's chest, tucked comfortably between them. Arthur's arm comes to wrap around his waist, holding him securely in place. He could fall asleep like this, Francis thinks. And likely will.

The night's air is pleasantly mild even on their cooling skin, and the world has long settled into quiet around them. Francis lets his eyes rest, telling himself it is only for a moment, and drifts off, warm in Arthur's arms.

He wakes up briefly when Arthur turns him on his back and smiles dazedly at him as he cleans him tenderly; dabbing away the worst of the mess with his shirt. He is already drifting off again when Arthur presses a kiss to the centre of his chest, humming appreciatively and looking up at him from underneath the fan of his lashes before slipping away again, lazy and comfortable.

He doesn't realise that Arthur left the room until he is startled awake by the sound of something being set down on his bedside table and the shift of the mattress as Arthur sits by his hip on the bed. Francis breathes deeply and stretches, letting his right arm bend and drop over his head before looking at him.

The sharpness of his profile is softened by diffused light and he sits quietly, with a leg tucked underneath himself and looking at Francis with an unreadable expression in his eyes.

There is a steaming cup held loosely between his hands, resting carefully on his lap.

"Hm, my poor kitchen." Francis teases, voice rough with sleep and use.

"It's just tea. And water, for you."

A quick glance to the bedside reveals a tall glass of water waiting for him. A drop of condensation drips down the side and Francis thinks that he can smell mint and lemon. Arthur must have found the bottle he keeps chilled in the kitchen.

Found. He smiles to himself. As though Arthur isn't familiar enough with his home to know where it is.

"You won't sleep," he reproaches. Arthur's thigh is close enough that Francis can run a finger down the bare slip of skin fondly.

“It’s green tea.” Arthur takes a sip and Francis wrinkles his nose; only keeps it home for Arthur who smiles like he knows this. “Drink your water.”

“Later,” Francis assures him, too lazy to move.

Arthur is wearing a thin silk robe in lieu of clothing. An old, finespun thing that Francis has barely even worn and mostly keeps around because he likes how bright it is; how delicious it feels against his bare skin. It falls, richly coloured and with a weight like water, over Arthur’s shoulders in a way that frames his body beautifully. Open where the sash has come loose, dipping generously down the centre of his chest, and riding up his thighs. He looks, for all things, like a dream. Francis considers whether he could throw Arthur’s clothes into the ocean and keep him half-bare and wrapped up in silk like a gift for however long Arthur will let himself be kept.

“What are you laughing about,” Arthur demands softly of him and Francis reaches up to brush his knuckles against his jaw like he did earlier.

“Come back to bed,” he whispers, “and maybe I’ll tell you.”

Arthur moves out of his reach when he leans away to set his cup safely down on the nightstand and Francis lets his hand drop limply between them. Arthur prods him gently when he turns back. “Move over.” He pulls back the sheets and sweeps his hand across Francis’ chest to compel him to move, when all Francis does is whine. “Come on.”

Francis would complain more, make a case for this being his bed and his side of the bed for that matter, but Arthur shifts his shoulder casually and the robe slips down to pool at his hips. It’s a sight worth reconsidering the virtues of compromise for, and Francis gives in, shifting over to let Arthur slip under the sheets while he wonders at the absurdity of his artless, aching beauty. Eyebrows and all.

He plays dead weight when Arthur tries to slip behind him, just to be contrary, but the kiss Arthur presses to his temple finally wins him over and he turns on his side to let Arthur hold him, relaxing back into his chest and relishing in the press of warm, bare skin under the cool sheets.

“Get the light,” he reminds Arthur right as he settles and he groans, letting go of his waist for a moment to reach behind and pull the chord.

Francis let the curtains half drawn this morning and light streams in from the balcony, washing the room in the powdery blue of the early morning. Arthur presses a soft kiss to his shoulder as he settles back down, burying his nose in Francis' hair and exhaling softly against him.

"Je t'aime," Arthur whispers into the quiet room after a moment, with the faithful hope that he is not alone.

Francis smiles, finds the bend of Arthur's elbow where it rests over his waist, and strokes his bare skin as they drift off to sleep.

End Notes

Toss a comment to your writer, oh valley of plenty xx

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